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Disjointed

2017

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Introduction

My history with the written word is not that unusual. As a student, I began by consuming it. Before long, I learned to process and regurgitate it. I was good at that-- an "A" student, who was known for his essays. My English teacher presented me with a writing award, calling me, "Pithy".

I read quite a bit in high school and college. The material I liked best I was not mainly prepared to understand.

For many years I quit reading-- other than magazines, newspapers or various online sites or publications. This was the case even though I worked at a library.

Life's hardships and a lack of patience for bullshit taught me that, in this modern world, a person has to be their own writer.

You can start by reading. You can keep reading, please do.

But don't forget to tell me your side of things. Please tell it your way-- if you don't, no one else will. Or they won't get it right.

Nowadays, you have to be your own poet, your own writer, your own artist.

"Disjointed" is a series of writings I have created over the past couple of years. There are essays, poems and a series of blog entries. All of the material is original. Some occurs in various places online, but this is the only collection of all of the writings in one document.

I would like to thank my family, for allowing me, as a young man, to learn. Thanks to my wife for giving me the space to create, and for restoring my sanity afterwards.

And thanks to you for sharing your time.

Essays

Here are four original essays. The first three have been lightly edited by artist Randee Silv. Ms. Silv was also kind enough to publish them on her art and culture site, "Arteidolia". "A Poetry Of Lossy Media" and "The High Fidelity Home" were published, additionally, in the online magazine, "Entropy".

The essays concern music. They contain a series of thoughts I was developing about what music can or should be. They are opinions, yes-- but also absolutely correct. There is no doubt about that.

New Industrial Music

"Those of us who live in an urban environment are subjected to a multitude of noises coming from machines and, sometimes, from loud human beings. I imagine there will be some study on this, but intuitively, I think there is an even greater quantity of sustained noise with relatively fewer dB's than big noises like explosions, ambulances or screaming babies. The latter simply draw more attention. It is not until the air conditioning is turned off or the street is closed down

for a market that we realize that there was something more on top of the silence, or what, innocently, we believed silence." -Miguel Parera Jacques

A genre of music called "Industrial" has been around for decades. It began with the band Throbbing Gristle, in the 1970's, and at the time was characterized by strange or unusual themes. This preponderance for the weird or spectacular reached a peak in the 1990's in Chicago, where bands like Ministry and Skinny Puppy used drum machines, heavily distorted guitars, and sampling keyboards to create particularly aggressive sounds and vibes. Early Industrial music drew its name from the "Industrial Revolution", and was associated with a world changed by big business, industry and urban living.

The main reason a "New Industrial" music is relevant is that the urban environments it connotes are growing. More and more people live in cities each year. The entire West Coast of the United States is close to becoming one megacity. Although some cities are not as prominent as they once were, generally cities are becoming places of choice for people to inhabit, and that is a trend that is worldwide.

I am in favor of creating a mythic aspect to the city-- living in cities has become so common amongst people that places like the DMV, the Industrial District, the Bus Stop, Train Station and other locales are now parts of mass consciousness. These and other locations have their own sights, sounds and smells. As a musician I am interested in exploring the sonic palette of such places-- of capturing or rendering their aural signature. How many millions of people have waited for a bus? Or boarded a subway?

Modern cities are often trapped in outdated, decaying infrastructures. How much more evocative is the train track or train yard when only a few, rusted, archaic cars lumber along those lines each day? Maybe this is the sad magic that "Urb Ex" photographers pursue when they risk life and limb to enter old buildings that have remained unused or misused for decades. What does the reality of global warming mean about the existence of large smokestacks, whether they billow chemical smoke, or not? Has some of the city become mythic in that it persists as ancestral memory, from the days of our parents and grandparents?

I would suggest that, in our current culture, the authentic music of the city is rap music. Rap is the only genre that captures the energy and danger of urban environments. The problem with rap is mainly that it relies too much on the human voice, and the city is more vast, more depersonalized, and less individual than a voice can evoke with any success. Rap also suggests a link with African (and hence African American) culture, and though a "New Industrial" music must encompass this kind of experience, it should not be limited to it, but should conjoin experiences of people with all backgrounds and histories who have come to cities to settle. A "New Industrial" should be more like a "Statue of Liberty" of music, welcoming all to come gather.

Being places for masses of people to work and survive, cities involve a depersonalizing quality. That is necessary, as the resources of the urban environment function for a broad spectrum of people with different needs. The bus works for us all (or as many as is possible), the courthouse must allow us to pass through and have our say and experience, and since we are all involved, not one of us particularly is, but us as a community. Hence the depersonalization. A

new industrial music should capture this effect as well, being similarly accessible to many people, and similarly abstract or non-emotive.

Further evoking a depersonalized quality is the lack of greenery in a city-- where many square miles of concrete and asphalt edge out grass, shrubs and trees, people feel cut off from their nature and hence from their roots. It is the job of "New Industrial" to make this experience aurally tangible.

If there is an emotional spectrum for the structure of cities it would be awe, and perhaps fear. We feel awe over the size and scope of its structures, over their ability to be rendered inaccessible, and the sense that they represent institutions that are beyond our control. We experience fear that a person might become lost or need help and be unable to find it, being shut out by the millions who do not know them or by the buildings that house necessary resources. Third Reich architects consciously made structures radically large, to dwarf and intimidate individuals. This effect is attained for convenience rather than intimidation in most modern cities, where huge skyscrapers are locked and secured and made places where the general public is not welcome.

It is possible that a certain "New Industrial" music could be used to counteract the more automated, mechanical or unnerving aspects of city life. This type of music could serve as a remedy for the parts of life (and other musics) which overstimulate. By using elements of our urban environments, but portraying them in certain ways—for example, with longer phrases or sustained tones or sounds, a composer promotes a sense of time that reaches beyond the current mode of "Jetzeit". This type of "drone" music, can easily be part of a "New Industrial" genre. In the words of Gerald Fiebig, "In recent decades, new forms of 'drone music' have emerged across a variety of electronic and even rock-based musical idioms, from 'drone ambient' to 'drone metal'. What they share is an interest in very slow musical developments, sometimes bordering on stasis. Listening to such sounds is very different from much of our musical experience, where variety and tempo are what we usually listen out for. But drone sounds not only challenge our listening habits, they also go towards deprogramming our everyday modes of behaviour, which are usually geared towards speedily, efficiently working through our everyday chores both at work and in our private lives. In fact, sociologists such as Hartmut Rosa have argued that the continuous acceleration of modern life since the beginning of industrialisation is now reaching, or has already reached, a point where human beings tend not to be able to cope with it anymore. Drones offer a possible antidote to this development. They invite us to listen closely to very slow developments, offering us time out from the constant rhythm of 'speed and efficiency,' giving us a sonic canvas on which to develop our own creative ideas."

Moving on to other specific musical elements, texture can be a quality in music as well as materials. Cities are full of textures-- largely due to the man-made substances that comprise the buildings, streets and other structures. There is metal-- both in its new, polished, "clean" aspect, and in its old, rusty aspect. Concrete, freshly poured and cracked by time and elements. Asphalt, black and smooth and faded and warped. The juxtaposition of old and new in the city makes this so. How do these visual textures translate into music? What does rust sound like? Or cracked concrete or pavement? Can you hear the edge of a slab of concrete? Moreover, the city has a presence-- a continuing existence in consciousness. Can we use sound to evoke this

presence-- the reality of the proximity of an urban environment, with its man-made, profane, polluted traits?

Many musicians have used traditional instruments to connote the city. I suggest that simply recorded phonographic sounds, using devices of varying sophistication, could be relevant. Recordings can be listened to directly, sampled and composed, or sampled, treated, and assembled after these processes have been applied. Effects such as granulation, distortion and reverberation can accentuate certain aspects of urban recordings. Effects can especially bring out texture and scale. Recordings could be made in both micro and macro environments-- capturing larger-scale scenes, and smaller scenes such as equipment devices and atmospheres of individual apartments or other enclosed areas.

Noise as an aspect of music has been explored. There are some (such as Luigi Russolo), who suggested that noise should be the main element in a new kind of music. Others, such as certain rock bands in the '90s, used noise together with melodic elements to create a "wall of sound" effect. Noise is part of the urban environment. I would suggest that cities are elements where noise has become yet another color on the sonic palette. There is more to urban sound than noise, but it would not be complete without it. A "New Industrial" music should reflect this.

I think it is time to ask why we called Industrial Music "Industrial", and to think about re-rendering in music the environments which this word connotes. I hope that musicians and listeners will consider the ideas represented here, as well as the techniques, and explore a new movement in music, using the "Industrial" moniker, but replacing guitars and drum machines with recordings, actual and processed, of real urban environments. A music less focused on overstimulation and spectacle than the original "Industrial" music—which allows room to muse and meditate, both on our surroundings and on our lives, in general.

A Machine Music Manifesto

Earlier in 2017 I brought up some ideas for a "New Industrial Music". A main component of this music involved using field recordings made of urban locations as sources. Rather than guitars and drum machines, actual recordings of the city were to be the source of sound. This idea has been further developed into a notion of 'Machine Music'. Recordings of machines can be used as source material for this kind of composition, and the use of machines found in an urban setting makes Machine Music both its own variety and an extension of the New Industrial category.

I have made this observation, and my wife recently mentioned this of her own accord, that music on the radio follows certain formulae. She noticed that there were similarities between songs that went deeper than style, and got into using singers whose voices closely resembled one another, or the same technologies and instruments creating the same sounds (such as a use of "autotune", which forces sounds, and especially vocals, to comply to a specific pitch). In a certain way, the mainstream music business is itself mechanical—methods and designs are used quite abstractly to generate products, much in the same way that factory machines do. Why not, then, simply express what is essential and make a music of machines?

Many forms of music already use or involve machines. Instruments are or resemble machines, as do devices used to record, including microphones and mixing decks, computers, and so forth. We master our sounds using software, on a computer. Files are burned to disc, or distributed online, passed from one machine to another and eventually to a mobile device or stereo.

Machine sounds themselves can be found in some music, especially in industrial music. A band might mix in a recording of factory equipment, or use power drills or similar devices as sonic sources, whether live or in the studio (such as the band Einstürzende Neubauten). The machines create a supplemental voice in the mix, or are used as one or a few elements. I would propose that machines should become the dominant, or perhaps the only, sound source in a new type of music. How often do we need to hear a guitar, flute, or bongo? Why not explore and convey a new set of sounds made by mechanical devices?

Machines can make interesting and often rich sounds. A normal microphone can pick them up, but even better is a contact microphone. A contact mic is a small disc that is attached to a surface. It picks up the vibrations running through the surface, passing along the sounds manifested in its target. Contact mics are great for recording the various sounds that machines make as they turn on or off and run through their many cycles.

An excellent example of a machine as audio source is a washing machine. A washing machine produces literally dozens of sounds, as it moves from cycle to cycle. Each part of the washing process has its own sound, from the percolation of water filling the tank to various gear-grinding noises as the clothes are spun about. These sounds can be captured and further processed using audio software—excellent methods are to try various forms of granulation, or to add distortion or reverberation effects.

Composing using machine sounds can be as simple or as complex as needed. Many machine sounds are variations of noise (or noisy drones), and therefore they do not need to be tuned, and can be mixed together and layered freely. Occasional machine sounds have a pitch, which can be used as a source of tonality, or adjusted to match any other pitches using basic audio software.

What is the effect of such compositions? This may vary, but generally by using machine sounds, though some amount of noise exists within the pieces, it is quite easy to create a regular, repetitive, precise and meticulous kind of music. I would generally call these kinds of pieces “soundscapes”, as they are ambient drone collages of sound. The sounds in the pieces seem to come from the same sonic family, and indeed they do, having been recorded from similar sources. This effect is heightened if the same recording method is used throughout (for example, the same contact microphone, recording at the same fidelity). It is the case that machines provide their very own new category of instrumentation, and can be harnessed to craft music with a very distinct aesthetic.

I hope that readers will consider furthering the New Industrial idea and developing a music of machines. It is a more honest approach to music, I feel, than regarding contemporary mainstream music as being anything other than mechanical itself. If a music is essentially of a machine, why not make it to sound that way? Machine Music provides a direct and authentic aesthetic of pragmatic, exact, and repetitive sounds, without using classical instruments or the

human voice. Machine Music paves a clear path ahead in the world of music, and it is a good time to establish and explore this path.

A Poetry Of Lossy Media

It is interesting that we try to create and preserve media that is, technically, “perfect”, or lossless, and does not fade with time. Perhaps a more honest approach would be to record on lossy media, and note and reflect upon the influence the passing years have—if art is a truly a mirror, it cannot truly be permanent.

People, animals, plants, they all age and pass away. Materials, even the sturdiest, do, as well. Astrophysicists can suggest an approximate time when the Earth itself will disappear into the Sun as it swells into a Red Giant star.

Theoretically, by using digital methods, we can create ideal and permanent records of media. A file I create today could be accessed 1000 years in the future, and if compatibility was in place, it would sound the same.

This is certainly a compelling and exciting capability. To the archivist, it presents the possibility to freeze media in time, so that any further decay is arrested. If all media were archived in 2017, then they would continue indefinitely as they existed in that year, at that time.

That’s all technically very interesting, but it does lack a sense of poetry. What is permanent? Ideas, perhaps, could be, or virtually so. Most things of this world are not permanent. Even durable materials such as stone and metal crumble and rust over periods of time.

Analog cassettes are a more organic way of storing audio—in a sense, a more humane way. Immediately the effects of the passage of time on the music is apparent while listening to tapes.

While surveying some cassettes originally recorded over 20 years ago, I noticed a variety of time- and device- based sounds—there was what we call “tape hiss”—a sustained, upper-range layer of white noise. To my ears, this seemed louder now than when these tapes were recorded—though it may be the case that I am simply more used to high-fidelity digital recordings that have no lossy sounds of this nature, and so I was more aware of the earlier sounds. There were periodic sounds that were something between metallic and noise sounds. I was not sure what those were—they seemed to have to do with the decay of the tape. There were also thrumming bassy sounds emitted by the cassette player. I was amused to discover that these bassy sounds could be detected on any of a variety of cassette decks, of different ages and conditions.

William Basinski, with his famous “Disintegration Loops”, captured instrumental phrases on reel-to-reel tape in the very process of erosion. Listening to these recordings is both musical, emotional and philosophical, as the process of time is made manifest before our ears.

In the 1990's, there emerged a sampling movement in popular music, in which phrases from older recordings were used as bases for newer songs. Many newer songs therefore contain elements of tape decay (or more frequently, vinyl scratches). Sampling in this manner has continued through our current day. This practice connects newer songs with the older ones, and raises issues both of the passage of time and timelessness.

For the musician, and perhaps archivist—there emerges a challenge. That is to capture, as Basinski did, media in a unique state of decay—to digitize the media at one moment, and therefore to preserve both its original condition, to some degree, and its “present” one. This brings up all kinds of possibilities—one analog cassette, for example, or vinyl record, could be recorded at different times. One recording might represent a certain symphony as retrieved from a particular segment of tape, say, in March of 1995, where a different recording could be made and cataloged at a later time—maybe March of 2005. The archivist (and others) could experience and assess the differences between the two recordings, and note the effects of time on the media.

Media freezes its source(s). Then, media, adding a layer of complexity, either remains “frozen”, or in the case of lossy media, begins a process of decay, altering the recording. The musician “Rapoon”, with his “Time Frost” cd (2007 Glacial Movements), used a recording of the “Blue Danube” as source material. The recording was ripped from lossy media, showing signs of aural decay. These signs were accompanied by glitches, patches of static and other noises, added by Rapoon in the finished songs. In the notes for the release, he envisioned a future person finding the recording lodged in a glacier, after a newer ice age. The image of a cd stuck in a layer of ice is evocative, referencing both the freezing cold of the glacier and the frozen state of the audio as created for the cd.

This year, I began a process of freezing several old cassettes in time and created “rips” of over a dozen cassettes. By capturing and preserving a tape mix, conversations with its author led to the sonic and nostalgic qualities of the tape, and its condition in 2017. The passage of time had altered the music, making it much more complex sonically. These recordings are, for the most part, available to me as lossless files, with no decay, as I have saved the files from when they were created. Yet, I return to the ripped versions and listen to them instead, with their warm, organic qualities, and attributes added by time, dust, heat and other factors.

The High Fidelity Home

Music, and especially ambient music, has often an aim to transport a listener to places they have never been, or want to visit. Some ambient albums sound African, some Caribbean--other musics attempt to transport a person to India, or even to ancient or prehistoric settings.

Another approach might be to restore listeners to their own environment(s). Music could supply a new filter for listening to the familiar.

Everyday items, appliances and environments might be recorded, and possibly processed, or even composed, to create atmospheric musics which recreate a person’s

homelife. The journey would no longer be to some distant place or time. The journey would be towards a new view of one's own surroundings.

One of my early exposures to drone music was Alp's "At Home With Alp" (1999 Soleilmoon). In this album, the artist processed and sequenced recordings made in his home, transforming them into gentle, ambient soundscapes.

A much-documented period in my career as mystified occurred when I began using phonographic material, both in and of itself, and as sources for other compositions. This material, gathered mainly in my South Saint Louis apartment, led to the creation of popular netreleases such as, "Nocturne" (2006 Treetrunk) and "South City Spring" (2006 Treetrunk).

What were the effects of such methods? I should mention highs and lows. Music like this can create new sounds and sonic environments, but they do not tend towards the grand or lofty, as much as ambient music often does. They can be aurally engaging, while remaining local, familiar-- even low.

Perhaps they are the musical equivalents of Duchamp's "Readymades", or of Claes Oldenburg's soft sculptures.

Modes like these are additionally helpful for musicians, as they are able to easily and conveniently harvest sounds from home, or from nearby, using any of a variety of inexpensive recording devices. They provide accessible sounds for which a studio is not necessary, nor are musical instruments, amplification devices, synthesizers, or similar gear.

My main contribution to "The High Fidelity Home" concept involves my project Grid Resistor. This 2017 project utilized a very specific type of source material. Only recordings of machines were to be used. These were nearly all harvested from my home, using a contact microphone. The only additional sounds were from the beginnings or ends of cassette tapes or from a shortwave radio, between bands. Roughly eighty percent of the sounds heard in Grid Resistor tracks were from home appliances, captured in high-fidelity, then processed.

As a result, Grid Resistor tracks have an eerie familiarity to them. They are both ominous and industrial, and suggestively domestic. As the listener drifts off into meditation, he or she finds themselves-- at home. The listener is back at home, yet this environment is perceived differently-- perhaps as if through a microscopic lens.

I completed my Grid Resistor project in 2017. At that time, I moved generally away from composing music. But I did continue to record local devices. Recordings of, for example, my furnace, space heater, kitchen faucet and other appliances were harvested and released on Bandcamp for listeners' enjoyment, and/or for use in additional and supplemental recordings.

In an increasingly dangerous and expensive world, it makes sense to stay at home. A person's home, as they say, becomes their castle. "The High Fidelity Home" pays heed to this understandably popular environment, transforming sounds heard everyday into new sonic experiences.

Poetry

Here are a some poems I have written in the past years. Many appear on the "Spillwords" site, where I have competed for attention with thousands of hot-blooded young love poets.

I started writing poems when a co-worker introduced me to the works of Philip Levine. Mr. Levine's heartfelt dedications to real laboring people moved me, inspiring me to try my hand, and to pursue a similar voice and purpose.

Fast Food

Dedicated to Philip Levine

I bought my first car myself

The summer before spent flipping burgers

Pushing grease from the metal, fat

Dancing like a Cretan bull

Mornings came quickly, hardly a pause

The biscuit man, already there

Was covered in a white powder by 5 am

Frame emitting plumes of flour

From open to close, the drive-through voices

Rendered metallic staccato by microphone

Clattered sound waves off and about tile

A line would form, and food was served

Semi-palatable, the mouth and mind forget

Waist and pocketbook did not

A dozen frozen beef patties

Stuck on wax paper-- pushed hard, off

they came, and onto the grill
Rows and rows of pale green type
Mutely but relentlessly conducting
The rapid motion, heated preparations
The seeming never-ending cycle of cheap labor

Afterwards, the day grown mellow
Sapped of light, rush hour ending
Walked a mile home beside the road
On quickly cooling grass, occasional breeze
The bull was dead, the feast concluded
Drippings dried on cotton, denim
Washed away by streams of water, it was all
Only in one day, one very long day

The Librarian's Song

Dedicated to Philip Levine

So you like detective novels?
They are at the end and on your left
70000 items, one is lost
Can it be found in seconds' span?

How long does it take one child
To re-arrange a shelf of books?

If I have no documented proof
Of who I am or where I live,
May I have borrowing privileges?

This was a place for families, still is
To some degree, supposed to be for
scholars, too-- replaced in time to a large extent
By dvds and Nintendo

The section most popular? Computer lab
16 glowing portals into the web
Each patron his or her own librarian
Connecting images, snatches of words
Data, forms, and videos

If you stay, peruse the shelves
Grown dusty with disuse, dates
Stamped back, not since 5 years
Books deemed "dead", to be removed

Somewhat surviving field of knowledge
Trampled by financial necessity
Into colorful fairground
Ferris wheel of spinning footage
There for those who can't afford
Ownership

The librarian, clerk
Arranging instant symphonies
Percussive stacks of musical discs
Come and go, stack and fall
Case cracked, replace
And card renew

Entropy, a cart of books
The shelver's cotton skirt
Brushes gently as she walks past
Like a feather against a great mountainside

A Love Poem

"My humps". My bumps.

The poem, a tease
Erotic words, turns of phrase
Underneath photo
Of young photogene

Post-structure, vague of rhyme
Professor wrinkled nose
At seductive lines

Schoolgirl fantasy

To your credit, Ms. Appleby,

34 26 34 nymph

You are not

Nor have ever been

But 48-year old retail employee

Tired from lengthy shift

Eyes a bit baggy

Lonely as a bird in the desert

Love (or lust) should be your dessert

Never mind the bachelor degree

Tempo, rhythm, analogy

Use the word to find a man

Attract a mate

Ignore the mind

The Barista

Coffee is a fuel

To fill many tanks

Levers force hot water

Through compressed discs of powder

No Folgers crystals, but beans

Imported from Africa, Asia

Roasted to slightly bitter perfection

Lines form

Bursts of caffeinated chatter

Time served out in teaspoons and porcelain cups

The day's study topics

For the student barista

Reduced reassuringly yet brutally

To simple cause and effect

Recipe

Arithmetic

The morning rush of suits and students

Later brought blinking housewives with kids

Wiping sleep from their eyes

The sun peeked behind shades

The poor people from the halfway house

Shuffled in, heads nodding over coffee cups

Strained beans counteracting meds

Or speeding their effect

Coffee the one med, the permitted drug

Ordinary luxury

Life pressed tight into moments

Eyes propped open,

Only later to nod in counter-reaction

Away To School

The previous summer, had grown moody

Tired of routine, brashly

Exhausted of family

Total escape was the program

Call home only once every while

To college

On the waters of Lake Michigan

With lakefill, temperate

Rounded stones on sloped hill

Peaceful oasis, North of city

Where coffee, dancing, women

Were nightly features

Oh, and to study, my connection

To life before, by day

Submit to class, evening-- mild homework

By this path, become one's own

Professor of Romantic Poetry

Young, brunette, attractive

Taught works by Wordsworth

Where child of parents, farm-hand

Moved to city, merged with populace

Broke connections

My parents, just a half-day drive away

Somehow no closer than Polaris itself

Their home and dorm illuminated after sunset

By pale and twinkling light of distant orbs

Chicago

The wind hits hard

Called "The Hawk"

Memories blown, currents of air

Twin lions protect the museum

Find your way by the Lake
Its waters your reference

The world can be seen
In a few blocks,
Neighborhoods Chinese, Dutch, African American,
"Altegeld"

Where I went to school, tried
To escape family
Rough trajectory

Years later, roaming the streets
Miles Davis in my head
Struggled to assemble change
To buy noodles, cigarettes

Almost every street I have seen
Many with friends from the University

Now city of
Urban cosmopolitans
Metropolitans
Black-shod hipsters, businessmen

Quickly walking
In tunnels of wind

Hardly looking, never slowing

Yet, I will never completely forget

The smell of grills in many diners

Concert halls

Cafes

The sights and smiles of good friends

In younger, better days

The Copy Center

Late '80's, a ragtag crew

This goes one of 2 ways

We help you, or you help yourselves

.08 per page, white 8 1/2 by 11

Make miracles from originals

Not always miraculous originals

With liquid paper, tape, scissors, glue

Feeding toner, reams of paper

In precise rectangles

The computer guy, with his own alcove
Steered us towards the future, back then
We did not know

Mornings meant teachers, ministers
Those busy in local commerce or government

Evening brought in weary students,
Rumpled businessmen
With stacks of invoices

Nights quite slow, erratic
Sometimes a heavy metal band came by
Making hand-drawn flyers for shows
While projects, stacks of sheets
Collated-- were fed though
Machines trembling, forever hungry
Yet always disgorging

My goal-- to remain anonymous
Blue-shirted, clipped tones
Exuding virtual reflections
Of customers notions
In professional fashion

For T.S. Eliot

Born in the same city

Saint Louis, far from England

Trained similarly

Though not as extensively

You were a poet in my curriculum

"The Wasteland", the song of "Prufrock"

As my wife and I walked by

The bronze bust

of T.S. Eliot

In front

Of the bookstore

A sweet sadness swelled

The poet, born with double hernia

Awkward, big-eared, sensitive

Viv left him for the philosopher

Who had bolder gaze

And broader appeal

A poem, then, for what should have been

For the world's most studied poet

If not most admired

These lines might not be admired
Why not then live a life, enjoyed
Love, happiness, intimacy

The drowned sailor
Cannot be revived
Whispers only survive

Acknowledge the reef where the waves pulled him in
Walk by, head on
Acknowledge, never be
Him

Knit Cap

Big Sleep

Dry light

Through dirty window panes

One long Winter, no
Central heat

My apartment, South Side Saint Louis,
Small already

Reduced in essence to one bed, where
Under the covers I lay

18 hours night
And day

Covered in Winter coat,
Knit cap
To keep the heat in

So cold, Somehow the faucet
Dripped still

The slow percolation of warmth
As it approached
But never turned
To ice

Onekama, Michigan

Rest In Peace, Grandma Mimi
I remember visiting Onekama

Temperate in summer, slightly cool
Half-block walk to the lake

Rolling down Angel Falls,

Steep slope of sand, laughing

Did not understand its meaning

Lovely town, white siding

Hotel, restaurants on edge of water

Sounds of waterskiers, boaters

While anglers gently dipped their lines

Near Portage Point

A day in the sun, returned

Sand in shoes, socks

Ate a coddled egg, fixed fresh

Cooked stirred hot in porcelain

Winter came, once the waves froze solid

Children played, walked yards out

Grandparents gone to rest, the Lake

Near their home

Whispers they have gone beyond

To a place of stillness and comfort

Ottawa, Kansas

Midwestern town, West of Kansas City

2 stops on the highway

Mundane to tourist?

Home and world to local

Residential blocks, houses of wood, brick, siding

Sloping yards well-tended

Converge in town's Center,

Grocery, bank, ice creamery

Down Main to rectangular, traditional schools

Library, city hall

Sunny park with rotunda

Crossing running water

To Grandparents' shop

Stately, solid warehouse

Inside, primitive furniture

Hand-painted signage

Wooden bas-reliefs of familiar faces

Across the street, the depot

Town museum, trains remembered

Ran through, departed

Home to grandparents and family friends

Rest in peace, Grandad

And Grandma

Santa Cruz

We spent a quick evening in the "City Lights" Bookstore

Rested up, boarders

In a house just off the Haight

Then it was South towards Santa Cruz

Short stop at the lighthouse

The beach was peaceful

A gentle side excursion

Between rides on the Boardwalk

After we gave coins to the fortune-teller

Your cousin served us wine

Made conversation

Her fair-haired husband returning later

(Time had little meaning)

From the waterfront,

Surfboard in tow

We spoke of moving to California
Leaving our emotional anchor
(Saint Louis)

But the millions of dollars
The earthquakes
The drought

The damp, chill sands of Santa Cruz
Remain in memory
Cool waves persist in time
Still caressing some tourist's sandaled foot

Saturday AM

Early in the morning
Springtime
The birds mated
Chirping loudly outside my window

Traffic sounds faded
To ambient noise, a dull hum

My pipes sang
Liquid, guttural
Chorus of water on porcelain

A celebration, loaf of bread

Jar of peanut butter

From the Shop and Save

(Food stamp benefits today)

Minimum wage, but Saturday

A whole day without organizing

Stooping, placing

My work as a shelver on reprieve

As the light shone in through slits

It fell on my waking body

A whole 24 hours to be free

A richer man there never was

Ode To The Modern Seafarer

I am the seafarer

On seas of information

Waves of web pages

News photos, popular music

Personal chronicles

Illness, babies born

Night brought on darkness
The housecat purrs my only lullaby
Monitor's glow evening's guide
Through data, song and image tide

The currents of currency
Ticking away with frequency
Still shots, stop motion
Life rendered in animation

The alarm clock sings its song
To the waves of data once again
Not collective unconscious
But collective conscious

Like relentless ants
Posting material fragments
Into one particular heap

The seas of memory sing to me
I give to them
A small shower of rain

Poetry Submission

Somewhat as Vegas

Words rattling like dice

Metaphors, playing cards

This is my submission

Derived from "submit"

I bow my head, offer

Lines carefully chosen

Approval sought, vindication

Rush of pleasure, affirmation

Poems made alone in room

Perhaps exposed to crowd in time

Submitting poet pondered

Ancient play of thought

When branch of tree fell

In wood where none could hear

Was there sound?

That time was taken, Energy

To form particular notions

Penses, rhymes

I would prefer, if like a limb

Had fallen to the forest floor
You sensed the crack of wood
On wood, earth, pebble

Wanted more

The News

Stanford scholar
Assaults woman unconscious

Right-wing reactionary
Runs against left presumed-puppet

Rogue One re-shot
With new director

Horrific flood washes over Texas

Transgender people
Have normal interests
Says Caitlin Jenner

Here I am in nightclothes
Quiet in carpeted room
Walls white, air condition

Wife asleep

My headline?

Disjointed

Part 1- “City Blocks”

Delmar Divide

Radical income discrepancy

Time partition, bandwidth

Empty or full, block by block

Sitcoms or spreadsheets

Building by building

Supply sedation, entertainment

Complicit to veiled agenda

Broken reflection, modern person

Haunting sound bytes, profiles, series

Accept the situation, find

Lucrative opportunity

Acquiesce

Get with the program

Take the offered hand, find peace

Or live on in pain and need

Part 2—“Underwater”

Underwater houses

Mutilation wave

Surf murder

Subsiding waters peaceful

An entire kingdom lives

Under the sea

With ecosystems

Hotels of coral

Plastic dumps

Garbage LaGrange points

Gentle giants, whales

Pass through the salty depths

Avoiding the land

Or larger ships

Civilian, military

Bearing commerce, toxic oil

Subsurface pipelines

Sonic booms

Survey the change in tides

The change in sea

Part 3—“Superman”

Desired connection
Digits, mobile device
Broken eye contact
Notify with sound or vibration
Split persona, public, private
Network doppelganger
Send my digital ghost
To haunt your house
To save your life, protect
Your young, There is
A ringing tone, a flash
Of light, it's just your
Phone

Blog Entries

Here I offer a series of blog entries. I wrote these in October and November of 2017, publishing them on my public blog site. My purpose was to explore living with paranoid schizophrenia. I wrote about my own struggles, and also the many confusions, challenges, paradoxes and mysteries present in today's world. I would like to think that these topics affect us one and all, crazy or sane.

A Schizophrenic Perspective

Views Of A (Fairly) Lucid Mental Health Consumer

Introduction

It started with the following Facebook post. I decided to admit to the world at large that I suffer from paranoid schizophrenia. Here is what I told my friends, family and acquaintances:

“Hi folks. I think it’s time I share something with you all. This is in the wake of a number of my fellow friends and musicians being honest about their lives and struggles.”

“I am living and having been coping for years with a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia.”

“As a child and teen, I was deemed healthy and was a very successful student, among other things, graduating near the very top of my high school class, receiving the highest ACT score in the state and attending a prestigious university.”

“Something began to go wrong during my college years— possibly triggered by the use of marijuana and LSD. Or, it may have just been a part of my genes, triggered by my age.”

“In 1995, I received the diagnosis.”

“My early years with schizophrenia were quite difficult. I lost nearly everything I had. I felt that my life would never be normal again. My status dropped in every way. My family provided me shelter for some years, but there were also many years when I lived alone, with little money, on a government check and food stamps. I was quite isolated, shunning social interaction, spending most of my waking hours engaged in my own particular forms of creativity (notably my main and eventually very successful musical act, ‘Mystified’). I got a lot of joy and fulfillment from writing music, even though times were hard in other ways.”

“Through my years of isolation, I kept my diagnosis private. When I met the woman who would later become my wife, I shared my condition with her. I did this at an early point in our relationship. She was accepting and supportive from the very beginning. I am grateful to have found someone special like her.”

“Typically, paranoid schizophrenia is regarded as ‘degenerative’— i.e. it just gets worse with time. But with the proper medication, treatment and support, I have seen a slow but steady improvement. Now that I am 46, I am happy, happily married and steadily employed. My main and only major symptom, that of hearing voices, is kept in check with the love of others and a single pill I take every evening in small dosage.”

“I would like to clarify that, in spite of my condition, I have a high i.q. and am capable of clear logic and deductive thinking. I have strong spiritual beliefs, and they are not strange— rather they constitute Protestant Christianity. I am capable of giving and receiving love, and do so every day. Though I have a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia, I now realize that my illness does not define me.”

"To give some examples of famous schizophrenics, John Nash, Syd Barrett (of Pink Floyd), and Jack Kerouac all lived with the diagnosis and achieved great things."

"I wanted you all to know this, as I feel that keeping such issues quiet is not fully honest. I also want folks to see that conditions like this can be dealt with, and people who struggle, though they have their struggles, really can live full, happy, creative lives full of joy and value."

"I believe there are those who may have guessed (or already knew) of my diagnosis. This may only confirm what they had suspected. Others may be surprised."

"This goes to you all, as I believe in love and in the truth, to my fellow courageous artists who suffer too and who have revealed the truth, and especially to my family and wonderful wife who have helped me get to this point."

"And here is to continued growth and improvement, towards the best, healthiest and happiest life I can achieve, with God's grace."

"If anyone has any questions, I am open to engaging in dialogue about the subject. Feel free to ask."

That was the post, from October of 2017. I would like to add that the reactions to that post were universally positive and understanding.

From here I would like to begin sharing some thoughts on my illness— first-had experiences with schizophrenia, rendered as lucidly as possible.

Schizophrenia And Modernity

I wanted to mention an interesting paradox created by mental illness. As a patient, I am told that my mind does not function properly. Since it is my mind, I have to accept this— that what I think is “not right”. Yet, I have to survive in this complex and ever-changing world. Any mind should probably doubt itself— but if it doubts itself profoundly, that makes survival difficult.

I have secretly had faith in my mind and my functionality all along. I have a high iq and and a great problem solver. I am glad I have this faith in myself, and hope that people in this world can find a way to avoid applying this paradox— suggesting that a person reject their own most basic thought processes.

Interestingly, this profound self-doubt is said to be part of the modern condition. An awareness of self, a rejection of several or many impulses (even essential or vital ones) is necessary for navigating this world. I realize that I am not alone— I am part of my age.

Isolation, Socialization

Sadly, one of my first tendencies as a schizophrenic was to isolate. I moved into my own apartment in South Saint Louis, and spent about 99% of my time alone. Much of that time was devoted to creative pursuits. It doesn't take a genius to see, though, that, already being a bit eccentric, I slowly slid away from normalcy.

Steadying influences included my family, and my job. Even volunteering once a week was helpful. When I moved on to working part-time, my contact with the everyday world, though awkward and stressful at times, was very helpful.

A movement has happened where lots of mentally ill people are assembled together in a "day program" environment. I tried that out, for a period of time. But— who's to say that, just because people share the same or similar diagnoses, that they will get along well together? It may be that, at times, they might navigate one another further and further from what is called sanity.

On the other hand, a movement has happened where mentally ill people are treated as being almost completely independent. They live alone, shop for groceries, and so forth (as I generally did). How often is it, then, that the sufferer lapses into isolation, possibly watching endless hours of television, smoking pack after pack of cigarettes?

My most helpful contacts were with sane people. From them, I re-learned some of the language of real life. But, are sane people willing to walk side-by-side with the mentally ill? Would that frighten them? Offend them?

Some might suggest that it is already the case— that society is sick enough, and contains enough sick people, that the world is like one big outpatient clinic.

A friend shared with me that there are sociologists (such as Hartmut Rosa) who see essential flaws in modernity— that the pace of life has accelerated to the degree that most people are simply unable to cope. Stress is a huge problem in our society— with its mental, emotional and physical effects. Further, my wife and I often discuss how often it is nowadays that a friend or acquaintance admits to being depressed, maybe having a bi-polar condition. I would guess that a larger amount of the population takes anti-depressant medication than most people realize.

Roles

As a schizophrenic with a full-time job, one thing I am beginning to see is that a lot depends on how I define myself. I provide technical support at my job, and to the extent that I can portray myself (accurately) as someone who can help, who has information to share that can benefit patrons, I can assume some degree of leadership.

If I were to continually admit to patrons and coworkers that I was mentally ill, or experiencing symptoms, I would find that to be counterproductive, and I might even lose my job. If I did, I would really miss it.

If I can see beyond the illness, and how it tries to define me, and believe that I can provide assistance to others— if I can in fact realize this aim— then I begin to assume again the mantle of health.

In essence, if I can experience what sane people do on a regular basis, take on challenges such as theirs, and try my best to adapt to them without shooting myself in the foot, I can begin to regain clarity and purpose.

I would suggest that this experience could be shared by many mentally ill people— including many who spend most of their time isolated or participating in various forms of leisure.

A program like Ticket To Work (which I was a part of) allows patients to take on employment without immediately losing their benefits. Benefits are gradually tapered off, as the patient begins to participate more actively in the world of work.

I can't emphasize how much this program helped me, and how important it is for functioning mentally ill people to find a productive and somewhat social means to occupy their time.

It is important for schizophrenics to appear “above ground”— in the real world, as producers, not just as consumers.

The Music Scene

During my more isolated years, I decided to try to become a musician. That had always been a dream of mine, even before my diagnosis. I found myself with plenty of time every day to create and share music, and was fortunate enough to have a computer and an internet connection.

I networked with literally thousands of people, most of them being fellow musicians. At first I did not know, but in time began to realize, that many, many of these people were also mentally ill, or somehow marginalized. Most of the musicians participating in the online music scene, including the netlabel scene, which I was so much a part of, were eccentric in some way, or had characteristics people would define as off-center. They were sexually “different”, living in poverty, and/or coping with addiction or health issues.

The internet music scene evolved into a large-scale phenomenon where connections were made and new and unusual expressions were shared. This seemed both exciting and at times disturbing.

The music scene definitely demonstrated that, thanks to the internet, all kinds of subjective experiences were being created and passed back and forth, often for free, and more than ever before.

One did not have to be a unique talent or millionaire to become a musician. It just took a computer and a few free programs. And so the gates were opened for all kinds of people (like myself) to participate.

Purpose

I was thinking of various purposes for this blog. I don't want to just talk about myself endlessly as a gesture of self-reference or vanity. Helping to de-stigmatize schizophrenia would be a worthy goal. I think, further, I'd like to suggest and convey that mentally ill people can be highly functioning people.

When receiving a diagnosis, it is often true that a person "drops out" of our society. They stop working, lose relationships, and fall off the grid. The government sends them a check every month. They deposit it, and get by in a new and reduced way.

This saddens and frustrates me. I am highly able, though schizophrenic, and I know many others who are, as well. Functioning schizophrenics might not make the best bus drivers, pilots or surgeons. But there are many, many other possible roles we could play in society, and some might involve a degree of expertise or leadership.

I think that needs to be said, and hopefully believed. That mental illness does not have to mean that a patient's life is completely or permanently compromised. There is much more that can be done, more potential.

This is not all on the health care professionals, to witness to this issue. Many already believe it. It is for society at large, yes— and perhaps more importantly for the patient himself or herself. When the world says for them to take a bow, have a seat and become consumers forever, I would ask more able patients to resist the urge to accept this. To believe in themselves, that they can do great things. To make a genuine effort to do so.

Disjointed

Somewhat on a tangent, I would like to remark on the disjointed nature of modernity at large. Certain works of art, such as the film "Brazil" (Terry Gilliam, 1985), express this well—the sense (and reality) that things can change quickly, and that sudden and unexpected shifts often happen.

It is an experience of different worlds. There is the world of the city, of the suburb, of the country. Work has its own world, and home represents one, too. The presence of others changes how this feels, and this all can become very complex.

The city itself, actually, is a good metaphor— how, moving from one block to the next, we can see extreme differences in poverty level, crime, infrastructure, and so forth.

Modern life can be disjointed, like the lines of the figure in “Nude Descending A Staircase” (Marcel Duchamp, 1912).

How does this reference schizophrenia? I would suggest that modernity propels many closer to mental illness than they would prefer. It can be a crazy world— just read the news. Further, I would attest that schizophrenia can make it harder to transition smoothly between these various worlds— it is that shock of travelling from home to work, or from one city to another, and so forth, that is so problematic.

In fact, with cell phones, the internet and other technologies, modern people can find themselves moving from world to another many times in a minute— often, doing so all day every day. The schizophrenic may find this to be especially challenging.

Symptoms

I wanted to write a short post about 3 symptoms of schizophrenia. It is interesting, because they sound oddly like coping skills.

“A Change In Sense Of Self”— the patient adopts a new and different view of him or herself, at the onset of the illness. True— and true, too, that we all tend to regard ourselves differently in different situations. In this life, we may define ourselves, as, say, a husband at home, and a technician at work. Further, to the degree that we allow others’ opinions of ourselves to dictate our identities, we might adapt all kinds of fragmented or inconsistent views of ourselves. Nowadays, our sense of self changes, it can be quite fluid, whether healthy or not.

“Racing Thoughts”— the patient expresses that his or her thought patterns move more quickly than they should, and perhaps sporadically. That being considered, life in this consumerist, technologically advanced reality can very easily bring on and even to some degree necessitate thoughts that “race”. I would even suggest that many people have racing thoughts— but that schizophrenics may find them harder to deal with.

“Flattening Of Affect”— the patient responds to stimuli in flattened and / or soft monotones. This symptom reminds me of trying to deal with crises in public, or any kind of escalating situation. Even healthy people have to step back, take a deep breath— and address things in level, calm ways.

Taken one way, these are symptoms of mental illness. In other ways, they are attributes of most peoples' psyches in this changeable modern life.

Drone Music And Schizophrenia

Drone music is a genre that is an interest of mine. As the musical act, "mystified", I composed literally thousands of pieces of drone music. The smooth, steady tones of this kind of music emerged with a purpose to bring on a state of calm— to soothe listeners, and perhaps even to induce trance states.

Pushed beyond a certain point, and drone can also resemble the "Flattening Of Affect" symptom— simulating cold, emotionless modes, even ushering them in.

Where to draw the line between a healthy sense of peace and an unhealthy lack of emotion?

Philip K. Dick

Philip K. Dick is a writer who is getting a lot of press lately. Among other things, he was a paranoid schizophrenic. There is a lot you could say about him, especially concerning certain ideas he put forward in his writings.

One major idea was that of subjectivity. PKD suggests that each person has their own point of view— which is legitimized by their unique experience(s). For example, in *Maze Of Death* (1970 Doubleday), he demonstrates that, in a small group of people, each person lives in their own reality, dictated by particular rules and traits.

A result of my own schizophrenia is that I am aware of this view, and often tempted to adopt it. The purer the subjectivity I accept, the more I can put forward my own perspective. Though it is said that I have a mental illness, a subjective view rather suggests that my reality is still my own and is therefore genuine, as much as anyone else's.

What is the problem? There is such a thing as a social fabric. I can say that, for example, I am having an aural hallucination, or "hearing a voice". If no one else can hear it, it would likely be dismissed as not being "real". This preserves the social order. And, I am one to admit, as I work with the public, that listening to people talk to themselves, especially in any volume, can be quite disturbing. It's all real to them, sure, but what about everyone else, and the things they have to do?

You might say that reality is democratic. If most people accept it, then it is seen as the case. I can claim subjectivity, but my view might be eclipsed by the majority, dismissed as being incorrect.

Some people I dialogue with suggest that we are moving towards an era where subjectivity will be the ultimate guideline. I am not so sure. If we are, I wonder if we can also keep peace and order.

The issue of subjectivity never really resolves for me, but can only be reduced to a dialectic, shifting between poles of value.

That being said, I think I can understand why PKD would think of things in a subjective way, and I do appreciate his many contributions to the world of thought, which are seemingly so relevant today— including his idea that the world itself, or environment, is like a character, and is subject to changing traits and qualities.

Time, Perspective, Madness

I once borrowed a friend's copy of Habermas' The Philosophical Discourse Of Modernity (1985)— a book of contemporary philosophy. I was a literature major, not philosophy, and I really struggled with the book. But there were a few ideas that resonated with me.

One was that of a modern reality of time. Habermas puts forward the notion of "Jetzeit". The idea is that time moves in a particular manner, as experienced by people, in this modern world. We generally encounter a kind of "low" or "empty" time- filled with everyday commerce, interactions and events. On occasion, we come to experience a "sacred" or "holy" time— our profane lives are punctuated by these kinds of Messianic interventions.

A theory of mental illness might be, what if this experience with time is misinterpreted? What if a patient either applies the Messianic time to nearly all events, or refuses to apply it to any? That would result in the development of false ideas.

If you are sane, experiencing most of your life as this low time, and a mentally ill person tries to impress on you that every moment is extremely important, ardently sacred, that would seem strange to you, inaccurate, unreal— unhealthy.

A person who never has encounters with the sacred misunderstands peak events when they occur— again seeming unhealthy, missing important aspects of a whole existence.

Would it be possible for schizophrenics to learn of and accept Habermas' model? I am sure it was his view that "Jetzeit" was reality, not just an opinion. It described our current modern mode. Therefore it would be helpful to be aware of this experience of time, and to try to share it with one another, and to accept it.

Has The World Gone Crazy?

Looking around at the world today, events in the news, and so forth, a person might wonder, “Has the world gone crazy?”

Well, from my point of view, I would say there is good and bad. On a positive note, the world will never consider itself insane— the majority of people will always accept their own perspective(s) as being real and legitimate. I believe that mental illness will continue to be perceived as a peripheral phenomenon— that schizophrenics, for example, will be seen as sick or maladjusted, at least to some degree. Reality is somewhat democratic. It will be defined by what most people suggest, and therefore what most suggest will be construed as being healthy.

On the other hand, the bad— modernity, with its accelerating pace, frightening feedback loops and other phenomena, may indeed be stressful and challenging enough that it is causing “normal” people to increasingly have symptoms of mental illness. At this point, it seems that there are more people in therapy than out, and it is suggested that anti-depressants and related medications are so prevalent that they have started to pollute our drinking water. Stress is a killer, and few are exempt from it— those who are seem not to grasp things.

So, paradoxically, the world is not going crazy. But it seems like a lot of the people in it are beginning to act crazy themselves.

“Fake News”

Not long ago, my wife and I were watching a local news broadcast. It covered a meeting that was held locally, which my wife attended in person, concerning a topic many find to be relevant. When she watched the news coverage, she was angered that it did not reflect her experience with the meeting— only certain people were interviewed, and the report was very much presented from a particular and abbreviated point of view.

The news media communicates with what seems to be an “objective” voice. If a report or story is not called an “editorial”, then it is to be taken as truth.

Yet, increasingly, I wonder, what is truth? What is objective? Can we know and trust what we hear?

The schizophrenic is asked to throw doubt towards their impressions and hallucinations, in order to deduce what is healthy and true. Sadly, I feel that we find ourselves in a state as an entire society that we must do the same.

Paranoid, perhaps, of me, but I suspect that the main movements and tidings on a global scale have been largely shrouded in secrecy for decades. Few people know the “actual” truth— I feel that we are not meant to know, not trusted to, as citizens— sane or mentally ill. I write this, not really being into conspiracy theories, as I find most of them to be false.

The question remains— who makes a claim to an objective voice? Many have tried, many have made that claim. How many have achieved this with due sincerity?

“Blade Runner 2049”

My wife and I went to see this year’s big reboot, “Blade Runner 2049” (2017), last night. There is a new director (Denis Villeneuve), a new musician doing the score, yet many of the same original actors and actresses. The setting, main premise and other elements were created by Philip K. Dick, the writer mentioned in an earlier post who suffered from paranoid schizophrenia.

An interesting resonance, not to give too much away, was the lead character’s (“Joe’s”) confusion over his identity. Though it was suggested from the beginning that he was a “replicant”, (a genetically engineered android), certain developments complicate this description, and this becomes a profound issue for the character.

This resembles a problem that schizophrenics often deal with. Terrible to say, but when a person has a debilitating mental illness, it can be quite a blow to self-esteem. The patient may wonder if he is like others— up to par— even fully human. There are those who, publicly or privately, might judge or treat disabled people like they are less than normal, less than human.

This is complicated. Not only is it painful for the patient (who may more than anything want to be construed as able and normative), it is complicated for those who judge. If they know there is a mental health issue, this becomes a trait that is hard not to consider. In fact, though schizophrenic myself, I have found it is nearly impossible not to be at least somewhat critical or distrusting of other schizophrenics, due to their conditions(s).

One of the more powerful scenes in “Blade Runner 2049” is when Joe discovers that a memory of his, which he considered to be fake, “implanted”, seems to have actually happened. The idea that he might be born of man and woman, “human”, causes a dramatic emotional reaction, and leads him to question how he views himself, and how he is treated by others.

I would suggest that, in many ways, schizophrenia can be more of a difference than simply a weakness, and can assure you that I feel as fully human now as I did when I was considered healthy. I am probably better at some things now that I have this diagnosis, and certainly still have feelings, a spiritual life, relationships, and the various components that make a person whole.

I used to see a psychologist, and I asked him what makes a person healthy. Wholeness was his answer— that a person has a complete and nuanced life. A whole person is physical, emotional, and spiritual. I can confirm that a whole life can be achieved by a person who has a mental illness.

Can others view a schizophrenic person as being wholly human? Can the patient him or herself adapt this view, as well?

Perfection

In today's fast-paced world, there is at times a sense that people should seem "perfect"—they should be virtually omniscient. They should look great, at all times. Never stutter. Never show weakness.

These are impossibly high standards. A mentally ill person must certainly come to terms with imperfection. Keeping this flaw secret for years was very stressful for me— and this became more and more awkward until I felt I was positively insincere.

Meditating on Christianity, it is believed that Christ was perfect, and without sin. That being said, we mortals are imperfect, and can never be without flaw.

Of course, to complicate, we try to achieve perfection. It is in our nature to do so. But we are always reminded that only Christ was perfect, and that His life and suffering are meant to free us from this tendency (and from sin in general).

Perhaps one key to actual ability would be for us all, schizophrenic or no, to admit to our imperfections, to realize them, and then to work from there, with the assumption that, of course, we all try to help.

As my mother shared with me years ago, "We are all wounded healers".

Serotonin

The pill I take, the only one for my schizophrenia, is Risperadol. I have taken it for many years. Lately, I have been gradually reducing my dosage, which is small anyway.

What does Risperadol do? It is a Serotonin inhibitor. It reduces the flow of Serotonin in my brain. Some may know that Serotonin has a lot to do with a person's experience with pleasure.

It seems that, for whatever reason, the way I experience pleasure has a negative effect on my mental health, generally, and my concentration specifically. When I go off of the medication (which I have tried, but don't recommend), I slip into a state of unfocused confusion.

I wonder if I am the only one, if schizophrenics are the only people, to notice that unhealthy relationships with pleasure, pleasure-seeking and the way the mind experiences these things, have a negative effect on one's emotional and/or mental life?

Patient Power

A schizophrenic patient assumes, of course, a subservient or somehow complicit role with their psychiatrist, and with other medical professionals. This is important, it is necessary. It has helped me to seek treatment, and to remain on my prescribed medication.

There have been other benefits of treatment, as well as case-management. My psychiatrist helped to convince me to quit smoking. I am very grateful to her for that, and glad that I did. Several of my case managers suggested that I seek employment, which I did— and years later, I am happily and gainfully working.

Just the same, as a patient, I feel I need to meet the doctors and caseworkers halfway. At least halfway. I have to put forth an effort, too. It is wrong to expect others to spoon feed me everything I need in life and all I need to know.

Although I am schizophrenic, I still need to work hard, pay my bills and taxes, and live up to my various obligations. I recognize that there may be patients so incapacitated that they are unable to do these things, but I would recommend that mid- to high- functioning mentally ill people try to push their boundaries to see if they can handle more responsibility.

I would suggest that many people are capable of more than they realize.

It's ok to hope for a miracle, but it takes effort, experience, and understanding to make things happen in the “real” world. Mentally ill people need to be more— gulp— self-reliant.

Schizophrenia And Intimacy

One of the main casualties of mental illness can be intimacy.

When I was first diagnosed, I remember thinking, “Ok. That’s it for me and women.”

The situation resulted in a complex. On the one hand, I felt unworthy of intimacy, like I was “damaged goods”. On the other hand, I felt increasingly afraid of being touched.

I took it as a challenge to my self-control. How little touch can I get by with? Can I keep people at arm’s length? Can I understand and control my own impulses, especially that of desire?

For many years, I lived in solitude, with little human contact. I did not even have a pet.

Slowly, something began to change. I started to listen to my body, to pay attention to my pain. I realized that I needed companionship, recognized that in some ways my life had become flat and two-dimensional.

I was at a friend's birthday party, and I was struck by an intuition. I felt that I was going to meet someone special there. I introduced myself to several women—each admitted sooner or later that they either were uninterested, or already had a companion.

One woman allowed me to give her my e-mail address. She later became my wife.

To be honest, 5 years later and intimacy is still a complicated issue for me. But I am relieved that I have someone to be with, and glad that I finally began to realize that I can't manhandle nature. I can't force my needs for human touch away.

Nature is not ever fooled this way—not for long, anyway.

Dystopia

I am going to share what I call a “schizophrenic’s rejoinder”.

It is true that this is a world with many so called “able” people. True, as well, that with mental acuity, persistence, technology and other attributes, they can achieve great things.

True, also, sadly, that we can initiate all kinds of mastery games, including some that threaten the very existence of the planet, such as military escalation between rival nations, pollution, and global warming.

The strong survive and thrive, while our planet slowly teeters towards ruin.

I think this is one key to Philip K. Dick’s (and other writers’ and artists’) creation of and rendering of dystopias—worlds where things are just not the way they should be.

Being mentally ill can be humbling, but it also allows a person to step outside the mainstream for a fuller view of the kinds of things humanity does—both impressive and not so impressive.

What Crazy Isn’t

Schizophrenia is a complicated syndrome of illnesses and symptoms that is hard to understand. Medical professionals themselves are still trying to figure out what it is, what causes it and how to treat it.

My main symptom is hearing voices. In the back of my mind, especially when I am alone, there is often a chattering of voices—those of people I know. These voices are not threatening, and are generally easy to ignore when I am in the company of others.

For me, crazy means the voices. It does not mean a lack of cognitive function. I am quite capable of deductive reasoning, problem solving and various other types of thought. Not only am I

capable of them, but I apply them often— sometimes helping to resolve issues that sane people have.

The point is that schizophrenia, and other mental illnesses, don't necessarily mean that a person can't be reasonable, responsible or constructive. Sane people should be aware that mentally ill people can often be quite helpful and even genuinely inspired. Patients should realize that they themselves can still contribute to society, perhaps even mentally or intellectually, and not to let their "disability" hamper their own efforts to understand the world and their lives, make sense of things, and help.

After all, today's world needs all the help it can get.

Hallucinations

I must confess, I spend most of my waking hours in front of a screen.

I am not one to binge watch cable or immerse myself in movies. But I do spend much of my time online, and/or creating music, video or other media.

Having created so much of my own material, it's hard for me to play the role of media consumer. I often feel that I am being steeped in other people's ideas when I watch shows— that I am being subtly programmed or offered false information.

It is interesting to me— when a schizophrenic hallucinates, that is involuntary. But most of us essentially are voluntarily "hallucinating" most of the time, when we imbibe programs and other media.

A few months ago I tried virtual reality— it was quite immersive, very trippy. Reality became even harder to differentiate from projection. In the future, I firmly believe that most of us will interact voluntarily with collective "hallucinations" (or virtual environments) constantly.

For better or worse, we will most of us agree to hallucinate together.

Symbols

For most of my life, I wanted to be a painter. My wife encouraged me, a couple of years ago, to purchase an acrylic paint kit. I have been practicing my art since, and have developed some special techniques.

One is to use spray paint, together with acrylic paints. I don't intend to rip off the notions of graffiti artists, but I really do like the way graffiti looks, and particularly spray paint.

Another technique involves what I call "Dream Symbols".

Dream Symbols are shapes or symbols that seem to suggest something vaguely textual, but are indecipherable.

They are a good representation of my early experiences with schizophrenia. For several years, I found myself unable to easily decode many of society's taboos and signs. I tended to miss subtle references or innuendos, especially involving things like sexuality, race, money and power. I think, in a way, I was pushing this kind of input away, refusing to deal with it.

Perhaps this was partly because, as a schizophrenic, I did not accept myself and my place in this world. If I correctly interpreted society's "symbols", I would have to admit to my reduced and partially incapacitated situation.

So, my "Dream Symbols" paintings and prints depict my hazy and confused interpretations of the communications I was receiving from the world. By encrypting them, I protected myself from them.

Trying To Be A "Guru"

I am still not sure what triggered my schizophrenia, back in my mid-20's. A good guess might be that the use of a lot of LSD over a relatively short period of time was part of the problem.

Even people without the gene for mental illness admit that recreational drugs can blur the line between reality and illusion. The experience of tripping on acid can be very powerful, at times terrifying, and is definitely not recommended for people who are mentally ill (or who have mental illness in their families). In fact, I would not recommend taking LSD to anyone.

Why did I take the LSD? I had gone off to school, and was on my own. My social status slipped a bit. I was no longer the big high school scholar, but on a campus with thousands of top notch academic types. Drugs were readily available and— I wanted to become a guru.

I wanted to become wise in the ways of the various levels of reality— to walk through the "doors of perception". I wanted to be able to explain to people the way life really is. To have a legitimate perspective that transcended the everyday.

I learned eventually that LSD only helps to unhinge the mind. If anything, it makes it harder to understand higher levels of thought, at least in any constructive way.

Furthermore, gurus are people who others appoint to that status due to their wisdom- not people who simply quaff many hits of liquid acid and go on trips.

Whether or not the acid caused my diagnosis, I certainly regret taking it, and am completely clean of such drugs at this point. And I am grateful to be clean.

Vladimir Putin

It can be a strange thing to live in this world.

A trait of human experience is “intuition”— that feeling that one knows something, but can’t explain how. For those with a keen sense of intuition, they are often right about things. Sometimes they are correct enough that it becomes hard to explain.

Back in 2015 I developed a fixation with Vladimir Putin. I had a feeling that he was going to become a bigger player in the world political scene. This feeling had no factual basis, but I felt sure it was true.

I composed a series of prints and an album of music based on Putin, which I called “Sovereign” (Treetrunk Records), back in 2015. I tried to capture the sense of mystery and fear I felt when I thought about Putin, and his possible rise in power.

Was it a coincidence that, roughly one year later, Putin became a center of global attention for his possible interference with a major U.S. election— and that this attention revolved (and revolves) around issues of “Sovereignty”? That some even suggested that this man has a hidden role in the U.S. government?

Easy to dismiss, perhaps, but I still recommend that people hold on to their intuitions, be they schizophrenic or no.

Muting Our Inner Voices

It is my feeling that most people live a great deal in denial, muting their inner voices and refusing to listen to the realities of life. This being said, I understand. There are certain fundamental absurdities about being human.

For example, we all will die one day. When that happens, we can believe in transcendence, but we can not know that until this passage happens.

But, how can we live our lives, fulfilling our obligations, when we are focused on imminent demise?

I grew up in the 1980’s at the end of the Cold War. It was a strange thing to be a kid, living in fear of the bomb. News about nuclear weapons showed up in a lot of our newspapers and news reports. It added a surreal, paranoid quality to life. As an eighties kid, you never knew if you would see adulthood, or old age.

Because we have to filter our thoughts, and push down certain things we know, some of our faculties become impaired, I believe, and it is my theory that our awareness and sensitivity returns occasionally in flashes of insight, revelation, or moments of peak emotion.

This is a bit like Habermas' theory of modern time, with its "Jetzeit" (or "empty") time, shot through with moments of Messianic time.

On The Dole

When I learned that I would be able to survive on SSDI (Disability Benefits), I was, at first, relieved. I believed that I would never have to work again. I could just collect my check, and live a decent life that way.

Over a period of years, I got between \$600-\$800 or so a month, and some other benefits, including EBT (food stamps), rent assistance, Medicare and Medicaid. All of this was very helpful and I was lucky to receive it.

That being said, it was not a lot of money. I got used to living on soup, frozen burritos, beef patties, and breakfast bars. I smoked cheap cigarettes—GPCs. I rarely if ever bought clothes. If I was lucky, I would travel once a year (my yearly trip to Chicago). I survived, for sure—but I did not thrive.

I did not want to recognize it, but I suffered a lack of self esteem from living this way. My family had a strict work ethic, and they tolerated my lifestyle but never really approved of it. I did have lots of free time, but I struggled to find things to do with it. Without my music project, I am not sure what I would have done.

Things are better, now that I have decided to return to the world of work and to get married. There are no longer mice running around my kitchen, or substantial and constant leaks in my bathroom. The tiles in my shower are not flaking from the wall.

I do understand how it feels to live a life of poverty now. Given that I was raised with plenty of resources, this was an eye opening experience. It's something about me that not everyone might realize—I, too, waited every month for my EBT award to come through. I also collected "circuit breaker" benefits from my property taxes. I went for years wearing the same sneakers.

I lived on the dole with all of its advantages and disadvantages, and I chose to leave that life for a more independent one.

The Groovy Sound— Of Schizophrenia

The music act I started, "mystified", was a main preoccupation during my years of isolated suffering. The project was both a huge time suction, and perhaps, a saving grace. It gave me something to think about. I helped me to set and maintain goals. And even though I never was signed to Geffen or appeared on America's Top 40, I did pretty well.

The netlabel scene was where mystified really got a response. Thanks to the mentorship of people like Christopher McDill (Webbed Hand Records), and others like him, the audio that I posted for free, usually to archive.org, began accumulating thousands upon thousands of listens and downloads.

To me, this was very exciting.

Reality, some would say, is often poetic. One of my biggest releases, “South City Spring” (2006 Treerunk Records), was created using phonography. I recorded sounds in my shabby, low rent apartment, and used the sounds to create songs. These gritty sonic collages appealed to the masses.

Sometimes mystified sounded glib, smooth or abstract. But when my project was the most honest sound-wise and thematically, it did its best.

Listening to releases such as “South City Spring” and “Nocturne” (2006 Treerunk Records) remind me of the ‘oughts— that ten-year period of living alone and working night and day to record and compose my own “schizophrenic sound”— the drip of a faucet, clink of metal from a pot or pan, the creak of a wooden floor, the slamming of a door.

Talking To Myself

As I have mentioned, my main symptom is that I hear voices.

Usually, I am able to recognize that they are just thoughts in my head. On occasion, though, when I am alone, I start to vocalize words— to converse back and forth with myself.

This must seem strange to people, and when my wife discovers me doing this, coming home unawares, or hearing me in the shower, I feel ashamed. Encountering another person, a living breathing human, reminds me that the voices are like pretend ghosts, and that it is silly for me to acknowledge them.

Being in the company of others is one of the best remedies for the voices. The tendency for schizophrenics to isolate can be tragic, as that tends to be one of the worst things we can do. We lose focus, loosen our grip(s). We drift off, our symptoms begin to appear.

Sometimes when I am working, or moving about in public, I come across people who verbalize their voices freely, even when others are around. I feel bad for these people, though I know how that can happen.

I would conjecture that a keener awareness of the presence of others, and its significance, might help these people to become more still, to calm or silence the impulses that compel them to speak out loud to themselves.

Going Blank Again

There is a symptom of schizophrenia called “a poverty of thought”. In other words, the patient simply has fewer thought processes going on than healthier people. Hence, they might seem disengaged, helpless, staring off into space, and so forth.

I felt that I was experiencing this for a period of time. I would attribute it to a general feeling of hopelessness. Why mull over the problems of the world when life is so absurd, and there are so many issues? Maybe it is best just to put them out of one’s mind.

I eventually felt that this was not the best of habits, so I tried to re-engage, finding various activities, creative and otherwise, to think about. Being married, and having 2 cats, also helps in this regard.

That being said, I would say that feeling guilty about empty or quiet states of mind is ultimately a bad idea. If a person feels at peace, that is really ok. If a person can’t connect at all, can’t function, then, obviously there is an issue. Otherwise, I wish I had never worried about the poverty of thought symptom.

Just today, I was feeling tired and out of ideas. I tried not to be concerned about it, and let it happen, and I am still fine.

Gestalt Theory

Gestalt Theory suggests, as I understand it, that we humans tend to perceive to some degree what we expect to perceive. For example, if I am thinking about the color red, there is a good chance I will notice instances of the color red in the world around me, more than if I had not been thinking of it.

Schizophrenics are known for having false ideas, and I wonder how many of these are bound up with a form of Gestalt. If a patient already thinks the FBI is tapping their phone, and a funny noise comes through the signal during a call, that will only corroborate their theory.

Even if the sound had to do with a cell signal issue, some storm somewhere, because the patient has this theory, their perceptions will fit that theory. They will attribute what they see, hear and experience to their expectations.

I feel that Gestalt Theory has good and bad aspects. On the one hand, we really do shape the way we take in the world around us, we have some authorship. On the other hand, we can become trapped in the world as we interpret it, bound to our own interpretations, which may be limiting at times, or false.

Keeping an open mind, and engaging in dialogue with others, would be good tools to combat the negative sides of Gestalt-style thinking.

Martin Luther

A figure who was a helper to me on my path was Martin Luther. I mention him not because he was critical of the Catholic Church. Rather I mention him because of his intense spiritual struggle, and the solution that he found.

History suggests that Martin as a young man was wracked with guilt—guilt that never went away. To remedy his spiritual situation, he tried a number of strategies. He flagellated himself. He fasted. He sang hymns for hours on end. He prayed. He confessed.

Finally, Luther arrived at a solution which had personal and spiritual ramifications. He conceived that Christ (and therefore God), was outside of himself. Christ abides, according to Luther, in Heaven, and Luther himself, in his own body and mind, can only gesture towards Christ— to praise him, pray to him, and so forth.

By differentiating himself from Christ, Luther was able to forgive himself, and to more effectively ask for God's grace.

As a schizophrenic, if I can distinguish my own mind and body from that of God, I can more readily understand the world around me, the people in it, and the universe at large. Incidentally, I am not the first mentally ill person to reach this conclusion, both about Luther, and as Luther did.

Sense Of Self

A symptom of schizophrenia can be “a change in sense of self”. The patient views him or herself differently, after onset.

When I was initially diagnosed, the psychiatrist suggested that I thought I was Jesus Christ. I was sure I wasn't, but there must have been something strange about the way I was coming across.

One change was that I stopped seeing myself as a discrete and whole entity. I was no longer an “acting figure” in life. I became very submissive. I was interested in saying only the right things at the right times, as others willed them to be.

Trying to please everybody is a trait I still have— it's something I struggle with. I think, in a way, it shows that I care. But people pleasing can go too far— it can seem false, or make people feel uncomfortable.

I have seen this in other schizophrenics— they always have to be the friendliest people in the room, and they are often very deferential. Mentally ill people need to give themselves credit, no matter what life or diagnoses suggest.

We need to remember that we are people, too— that we have roles to play, and places in the bigger picture. We can make changes happen, in big and small ways.

In short, schizophrenics need to be— gulp— assertive.

MTV

I wrote a bit earlier about the disjointed nature of modern life— the quick transitions from world to world, setting to setting.

Back in the 1980's, when I was a teenager, a new network emerged called MTV. This was a music channel that displayed music videos— often back to back for longer periods of time. Music videos were new to the world, and so was this kind of programming.

It spoke to the increasingly jarring nature of reality. Instead of slower-paced dramas or sitcoms, using the same characters over months or even years, programming was comprised of short snippets of media, perhaps shown again but appearing in different sequences.

The music was loud, there were lots of new sounds, and there was lots of rock and roll.

MTV lessened the strain on our attention spans— and it also spoke to the rapid pace and quick transitions that are so characteristic of modern life— and that can be so difficult for schizophrenics to navigate. I can testify that, with my diagnosis, it can take some time and energy to assimilate to new situations and environments. Life can feel more like MTV than a soap opera.

Later on, MTV changed their format, and explored the world of reality television. Again, this was innovative. It brought up a new idea— putting “normal” people in front of cameras for prolonged periods of time.

I would suggest that this was an abnormal phenomenon. Being on camera is different than being off. A person tends to be aware that they are being watched— they hold themselves differently, their speech is more contrived— they tend to be more on edge— even paranoid. Reality television is not really “reality” as we know it— it represents a new kind of reality— a televised reality.

In fact, my paranoia often feels a lot like I am on camera. I sense that others are somehow watching me, listening to me, tuning in. When I am alone, I am rather part of a community, a network. The sensation is pretty convincing. It reinforces the notion that MTV accurately depicted ways that modern people think— be they natural and healthy or no.

Musique Concrete

As a schizophrenic, I might ask– what is reality? What am I really experiencing? Is it authentic? If I share my experiences with others, will they invalidate or deny them?

I would suggest that in today's world, it is getting harder and harder to distinguish reality from artifice, more and more difficult to establish what is authentic. This can be disorienting for anyone– and is especially so for a schizophrenic.

One example of the blurred lines between things is the type of music called “musique concrete”. In traditional “abstract” music, actual instruments or voices are used. A musician, or musicians, sing or play instruments in tandem.

In the modern era, recording techniques have led to the emergence of Musique Concrete, in which recorded portions of sound are used as components. Often, musicians do not play the music at all– it is assembled, or mapped out in a software program– as segments of audio that are manipulated and arranged.

This can be somewhat disorienting. A non-instrumentalist can make a song that makes him or her sound like they play in an orchestra. A man can use a female voice, or effect his voice to make it sound effeminate– or, he can make it deeper, more masculine. Traditional musical sounds can appear alongside other sounds– field recordings, sound effects, and so forth. A musician can use “loops” (or repeating pieces of sound), to create the impression that the same phrase has been played again and again.

As a result, it is hard for me to say what I am hearing, and how it was created. I literally have no idea how much of a piece is “authentic”, and how much is “artificial”, or somehow canned.

I find that this kind of music is not altogether unpleasant, but it does raise questions.

Musique concrete represents one of many ways that modern reality works against traditional experiences, which, again, can be confusing for mentally ill people (and, frankly, for healthy people, too).

A person has to either be extremely sharp and prepared, or they need to let go, no longer worrying about the authenticity of what they see and hear– giving in to the levels of artifice present in today's world.

CG

As technology improves, our ability to blur the lines between real and imaginary worlds progresses.

The use of “CG” (or “computer generated”) effects began some time ago. I remember watching the film “Tron” (1982) as a child. Though it looks primitive today, computers were used to create an entire universe in that film— interestingly, it was a universe inside a digital network.

George Lucas was a big proponent of CG effects, much to the chagrin of some of his fans. He was one of the first directors to add entire CG characters to a major film (such as in “Attack Of The Clones” [2002]).

Early CG characters did not fare so well, in terms of popular reaction. Viewers could easily tell that the figures were “not real”— that they were generated, and did not belong to the visual universe of the film.

Years later, and CG has become eerily advanced. Older characters, from actors or actresses who have aged or died, are being digitally resurrected into films. For example, the Rachel character from “Blade Runner” (1982) reappeared in “Blade Runner 2049” (2017)— and did not age a day in several decades, by all appearances.

It is a powerful ability, to use computers to create nearly any imagined image. It has already been an issue in news media that doctored, “photoshopped” images have been mistaken for actual ones.

As a schizophrenic, I have trained myself to doubt my senses. Perhaps we are approaching a time when we all will have to question what we experience.

If virtual reality catches on (and I believe that it will), I wonder how much of a grasp of the authentic, material world we will retain?

North Korea

I have mentioned the uncomfortable, paranoid feeling of growing up in the 1980’s, with the Cold War going on. A friend of mine pointed out that kids these days have similar fears.

Indeed, I am worried that we may be resurrecting the Cold War mentality. There has been escalation with Russia in the past years, and, of course— there’s North Korea.

North Korea, led by the sinister Kim Jung-on, has been threatening to nuke the United States for many years. So effective is their media campaign, that nearly every week, a new threat emerges from this small but militarized nation.

It raises the question— should we be afraid? Should we live in fear of North Korea? If we believe what we see and hear, we should be afraid, indeed. A nuclear war could easily claim millions of lives— and by all reports, North Korea is increasingly able to start one.

Or—should we doubt our senses? Ignore the news? Life is hard enough without issues like this, after all. How are we going to get through the work week, if we have to worry about Kim Jung-on and his whole bizarre campaign?

I hope that my sane friends and not starting to feel a bit like I do. Paranoid schizophrenia is not an enjoyable condition.

In Public

I wanted to add a quick post from work.

I am at my full-time job now. I feel nearly symptom free, and calm but alert. It has been nice to help quite a few people with their technological needs today.

I feel whole—almost sane.

The fears and blurred reality thoughts from my other posts seem especially paranoid from this perspective. These issues, and issues like them, have retreated to the background. That must be because my other posts were all written in my home environment. I usually write in solitude, now I am in the company of others, and have a role to play.

Having a job demands steady attention, and awareness. This is a great help to my schizophrenia. Work is not always easy, but I would definitely recommend it to many more mid- to high-functioning schizophrenics.

Take a chance, work alongside the sane. Help others. Heal yourselves.

45

It's a strange experience to see popular culture influencing politics. Some would say that Ronald Reagan pulled it off pretty well in the 1980's, though I am not sure the extent to which he was mainly a figurehead for his cabinet and others.

Arnold Schwarzenegger was known both for being "The Terminator" and the Governor of California.

Donald Trump, I always thought, was a successful businessman, and quite a character, with his own reality show. He was a campy figure—showing up on the wrestling network, making crass comments, and so forth. A symbol, both of American success and its corruption.

Trump's Presidency has further blurred the lines between reality and fiction for me. He tweets late at night, often impulsively. He hires and fires staff members like he's running a fast food restaurant. He puts forward a consistently campy persona. He still seems like a caricature—

larger than life. He is still Donald Trump, mainly himself, and it's strange seeing him in the White House, instead of in a casino or a pool hall at a nice hotel.

I don't disavow everything he has done. He seems very adept at manipulating mass opinion, and in this era that is important. I wouldn't call him stupid. He does seem to have a certain horse sense. And some of his policies are helping the economy— at least for now.

But I have never in my life seem a President act and speak the way he does.

I guess you may be detecting a theme in my posts. My wife suggested that I should not associate so many topics with my mental illness. So what does 45 have to do with schizophrenia?

Just that the world itself feels less sane every week.

It really does.

Radical Doubt

Looking back on many of my posts, and thinking about the world we live in today, a possible coping mechanism would be to institute a practice of "radical doubt".

By this, I don't mean a person should abandon all faith.

I think they should consider what they sense— and how to respond— before they believe in the authenticity of things. If they read an article in the paper, they need to ask who wrote it, and from what point of view. If they see an image, it is important that a person knows if they are getting a complete and accurate picture from it. Video footage, too— any media— can be doctored.

This comes from a paranoid schizophrenic, so you may choose to dismiss it. And that is fine, if you do, it's your decision. But I do know that I apply a rigor to my own thoughts and impressions, and definitely filter what I take in— and disregard a great deal of it.

In my own experience, there really isn't that much to know, of the things that a person can know at all.

To me, radical doubt makes a person mature. It differentiates a child from an adult. It is also what kids see in their parents that they fear or make fun of. Using radical doubt, though, isn't really being a "stick in the mud". A person can doubt many things and still believe in the important ones.

If there is any hope for this world, intelligent people need to question what they take in and establish their own realities. They then can react to the world's changing and confusing stimuli effectively.

The Voices Are Real... Or Are They?

Did I tell you about how I tried to explain that the voices I hear are real?

One mistake I made, when I did this, was that I quoted the Bible. When a schizophrenic person quotes the Bible, a lot of times that is a bad sign. People start to shake their heads, even walk away in disbelief.

The Bible mentions certain spiritual gifts, such as the abilities to perform miracles and to prophecy (1 Corinthians 12:8–10). If a miracle is possible, what isn't? Additionally, many Biblical figures mention hearing the “voice of God”. Did they hear an audible voice? Was it a thought? Or were they just schizophrenic?

After all, the voices can be very uncanny, and their resemblance to the sounds and thoughts of people I know are so close as to often be convincing. How could this chatter be something I made up? Is my mind that creative?

Humans sense more than we let on. I can tell when my wife is upset, and perceive others of her moods, fairly easily. And its more than just body language, by the way—there are things about a person's presence that we experience without acknowledging. I would have to say they have to do with a spiritual reality.

If we can sense things as ephemeral as moods and emotions, who is to say that certain sensitives can't hear thoughts, or voices, of others?

When I made an attempt to explain my theory with my psychiatrist (a very helpful and friendly woman), she immediately increased my daily dosage of Risperdal.

Repetition

My wife shared with me a trait she attributes to my illness—that, particularly in art, when I start a kind of task or trend, I do the same or a similar thing over and over again many times.

I often defended this as “practicing”—or, as Brian Eno suggested in his Oblique Strategies cards, “Repetition Is A Form Of Change”.

That is my view.

To my wife, a repetitive work ethic seems strenuous and extreme, and lacking in variety. She feels that it is my schizophrenia that prompts me to create in this fashion.

Perhaps an example of this would be my musical project, “Grid Resistor”. As Grid Resistor, I created over 26 hours of industrial drone textures in about 5 months. All sounds used in each

piece were machine sounds that I had recorded. Each release was over 1 hour in length. The tracks had a naming convention, based on the date and point in the day that they were recorded. There was one release for each letter in the Greek Alphabet, and that letter was the release title.

A record label called the Grid Resistor project, “a window to an introspective and sterile world”.

Another example of this kind of creativity was when I used certain graphic processes to pixelate and otherwise manipulate photographs. I made hundreds of images, therefore, based on squares. This concerned my wife, who suggested that people had no need for so many works that were so similar.

All of this activity seemed perfectly normal to me. I am not sure how my friends on social media felt. The only phenomenon I noticed was that they tended to pay less attention if I did too much of the same thing.

What do you think? Do I exhibit good practice or is my creative process twisted and obsessive?

Can You Believe Me?

It used to be said that “A man is only as good as his word”. This saying is probably not considered to be hip, as it is gender exclusive. Nonetheless, it does point to an accepted notion—that to be valued involves being trustworthy. If you say it, you must mean it, in order to be believed.

How can people believe the words of a schizophrenic?

This was a big problem for me, especially at first. Whether it was the illness itself, or just how I was coming across, people tended to doubt the things I said. I often became frustrated, particularly when I was being as honest and as genuine as possible.

I remember once I was in a room full of people. I looked outside the window and saw raindrops coming down. I said, “It’s raining today.”

Someone turned to me and replied, “No, it’s not.”

Of course, I can understand, in a way. If I am hearing voices, or have other symptoms, such as false beliefs, paranoia, and so forth—can I myself be trusted?

Interestingly, modern literature often involves the assumption that there is no completely trustworthy narrator. All characters in a book, including the one whose voice we channel, are human and therefore flawed. There is no modern Percival.

Yet, I would hope that people might consider that schizophrenics, too, want to be believed, problematic as that may seem. And, they may often be right about their notions, or at least they may present a viable and valuable point of view.

I am glad to report that, as I got older, more and more people placed their trust in me, be they family members or others. One, my wife, even calls me- "Her rock."

Loops

In my various musical incarnations, including "mystified", I recorded using loops. Loops are pieces of media that are used repetitively. Often, they simply continue, without changing.

With loops, a small amount of material can easily become much longer.

Life has many loops. For example, there is the work week. Mondays are often very similar to one another, at least for me. Fridays have a particular character.

The sun has a certain motion across the sky, daily, and annually, too. We have morning, noon, and night. Also, there are Spring, Summer, Winter, and Fall, with all of their various attributes.

I know that every Fall, I remember the feeling of going back to school after summer break. I am not sure what triggers this— maybe it is the smell of decaying leaves (it is said that smell often prompts memories).

Thought processes, too, I feel tend to run in cycles. We may believe that we think in a linear fashion, but actually, we tend to run over the same or similar thought patterns many times a day.

What causes a sense of disorientation, whether listening to a song with lots of loops in it, or thinking about other loops, be they in our minds or in the world around us, is when our perspective shifts.

Recently, when I have my "back to school" thoughts, they come with the recognition that I do not actually have to buy school supplies, or plan to study again. That is all from the distant past. I both anticipate school, and realize that it will not actually be part of my life.

Then, the source of repetition provides a familiar input, but where we stand in relation to it shifts. As Brian Eno suggests, in his Oblique Strategy deck, "Repetition Is A Form Of Change".

This relationship between the changeable self and a static reality can feel strange— "trippy", as some might say. Mentally ill people may find it to be particularly unsettling.

Whether healthy or schizophrenic, modern life's tendency to repeat itself, to run in cycles, is very much a part of human experience.

The Body

I have been thinking a lot about how thoughts have a physical nature to them. Of course, we like to consider ourselves to be spiritual (or, nowadays, mostly cerebral), but in fact, the way we feel and even think has a lot to do with our bodies.

When I am physically calm and comfortable, I can think more clearly.

My wife and I always see certain things differently— I think this has to do with physical differences tied to our gender(s).

The medicine I take inhibits Serotonin in my brain. Serotonin is associated with experiencing pleasure. So, what, in part, keeps my lucid has to do with my body feeling less pleasure.

I wonder if, instead of associating most of what we feel and think with a sort of identity, we were to admit that a lot has to do with our bodies, and how we treat them, and how they are treated.

By no means does this mean that a person would only experience pleasure, at all times, forever.

Perhaps, though, they could admit that what pain there is is sometimes needed to produce clarity—to survive in a complex and changing environment.

I have had a bad history of denying my physical nature and needs and I feel sad for people who still can't see this about themselves— who rock back and forth uncomfortably, refusing to associate sadness and anger with personal, corporal pain.

A Strong Intuition

A powerful intuition seized me today, that might help to resolve some of the reality versus illusion posts I have made, and some of the issues in them.

It was that there must be a firm duality, a difference, nearly a Cartesian one, between the world of sensory experience and some kind of emotional or spiritual world.

For example, if I am home with my wife, I can watch a program on my laptop— presumably for as long as I like. That does not eliminate my awareness of, or the reality of, my wife's presence. It does not cancel out the significance of our relationship.

Humanity may indeed be heading down a proverbial rabbit hole. With virtual reality imminent, I think it is essential to grab hold of something real. That is a kind of interior reality, where relationships, love and faith exist.

We have to hold tight to the yarn that we let loose as we walked into the labyrinth.

I would go so far as to suggest that, insofar as a person is able to grasp this duality, this division between the sensory and the internal or spiritual, that dictates the individual's ability to lead a sane and worthwhile existence.

Note that I am not trying to moralize away the world of the senses-- only to suggest, to remind, perhaps myself if no one else, that sensory experiences will forever be apart from the worlds of the heart and soul.

Show Me

Do me a favor— distract me. Not from my purpose, but from myself.

You can put an end to my inner conversations by offering me real things to talk about, and actual people to talk with.

My meandering creativity, which so often slowly moves away from the world of work and commerce, can be reoriented, made to focus, when it is given a purpose, when its activity is requested or needed.

If I feel I have a reason to try, and an avenue in which to do it, I can achieve great things.

I can't help but to wonder how true this is for so many mentally ill or other disabled people, as well as the elderly and others pushed to the periphery of our culture.

How often is it the case that at issue is not a lack of ability, but a lack of purpose. Not less talent than is required, but the need for a means to express it.

Point me to a road to a better life, and I might just take it. I doubt that I am alone in this.

"Normal"

I have schizophrenia, yes.

But to me, I am normal.

If I think about it, that's true. That's because I recognize my own thoughts, experiences, and means of processing things. My life is predictable enough, steady enough, that I know what to expect. Plus, I am now 46— not a kid anymore.

That's what's so strange when one is mentally ill, and light is shed on one's thoughts— as being abnormal. Because, to the patient, of course, they are quite normal— habitual, even.

I have been going back and creating some mini-documentaries about my old musical projects. One of them, "AutoCad", had a lot to do with numbers— fractals, equations, and so forth.

I spent some time jotting down my memories about that act, and read them out loud into a recording device.

Hearing my thoughts later, I was like, "Man, people would think that is weird."

AutoCad involved some strange ideas, and it may be that the world would not readily accept them.

So, for sure, when speaking with others, especially the mentally ill, it might be best to remember that to them, their thoughts and reactions might not seem very shocking— no matter how unusual they might seem to you.

Frozen Burritos

Alas, as an isolated schizophrenic, not only was I poor, but often lacking in judgement.

One way this manifested itself was through my diet.

At one point, through a combination of Olanzapine and unhealthy eating, I weighed over 270 pounds.

I had only one pair of pants that fit, and could not stand my appearance. Nor was it healthy.

I remember frozen burritos— bleach-white tortillas containing a gritty bean and beef paste.

I remember Holton meats. These were beef patties that came in packs of 20. I would grill so many of them that the smoke and soot changed the color of my kitchen. When I read the ingredients of Holton patties, I noticed they contained, among other things, beef hearts.

I remember Totinos pizzas. They look like microwave pizzas, and used to cost about a buck apiece. But you still have to fire up your oven to cook them.

I remember Ramen— 3 packages for a dollar. Boil the noodles up, and fill your empty stomach.

I remember Pop tarts.

I remember chewy granola bars.

I remember extremely cheap whiskey. I stopped drinking that because I did not ever know how much I was taking in.

I remember two-fer beers— you know the kind-- tall boys. These were for when you are poor enough that you can only think of today— really, only this hour of the day.

I am not exactly Julia Childs nowadays, but things have gotten better. When I backslide, my wife voices her concern, and I redouble my efforts to eat a more healthy diet.

If anyone wonders why schizophrenics tend to live shorter lives— well, it's not mental or emotional. It's the crap they eat, drink and smoke.

Aliens

I am going to write a post about Aliens and U.F.O.s, but I don't think this is the post you are expecting to read from a schizophrenic.

Not long ago, it was revealed that the legendary military site, “Area 51”, which was said to have been involved in all kinds of top secret U.F.O. activity, was actually used for many years as a testing stage for high-performance military aircraft. The strange lights and other phenomena people reported were actually planes built by the U.S. for military purposes.

I pretty much don't believe in U.F.O. sightings, and I think the footage we see is of other things, or it's been doctored.

As for aliens, I have done some incidental research, and I believe that Americans' fascination with aliens in the 1950's had to do with the Soviet Union. I am not sure if military propagandists started it, but fear of aliens was just another form of “Red Fear”. The aliens were a symbol of the unknown invader— powerful and with high technology. The aliens represented our terror of a Russian invasion. I think that was all it was, plain in simple.

Yes, the truth is “out there”— but not that far.

Very Strange Ideas

Being a schizophrenic, I am sensitive to the fact that some of my ideas might be taken as false—that my thoughts might be held into question. I don't like thinking that, but I do admit that it is probably a good idea— not only for me, but for people in general— that thoughts are considered before they are accepted as truth.

I have heard some interesting notions myself, and am often not sure if the people who voiced them were mentally ill or not.

My wife and I shared a cab after a trip, and the cab driver insisted that Hillary Clinton was one of many “reptile” people. He felt that the reptile people came from somewhere other than the Earth, and that they intended to take over the planet.

I hear lots of political and financial ideas. One man told me at great length that a network of banks controls the world, not governments. He listed several tie-ins that suggested that major events were related to the monetary decisions of banking institutions, though most of us did not know this.

Another man I came across, who later admitted that he had been in a motorcycle accident, told a coworker at that there was some kind of tax conspiracy here in our hometown and it had to do with the courts. People were being bilked out of millions of dollars.

When people have theories like these, and share them— I notice some commonalities. One is that they tend to go on for some time about them. The ideas were obviously formed in solitude, where they grew quite complex and elaborate. Another is that they always have lots of evidence— loads of it.

It is as if, at the end of hearing these monologues, no matter who we are, we have no choice but to agree that the theories are indeed fact.

Either there are a lot of sane people out there with false ideas or there are lots of schizophrenics— more than one might expect.

Down The Rabbit Hole

I have been trying to focus more on establishing dividing lines between reality and illusion in more recent posts. This especially pertains to the post I made about creating a duality between sensory and emotional realities.

Today, something strange happened, and I had a little bit of a freak out.

My wife’s Google Photo Assistant assembled a video using only pictures of our cat Tobi from the last 2 years. Some pictures were close-ups, others from farther away. Some had other people in them. But all included Tobi. There was even a little musical piece accompanying the video, using synthetic bells and guitar sounds.

Apparently, the Google network was able to recognize our cat’s face, and put together this media on its own, without us asking.

In other instances, I can explain away such things— ie, I might know how a system could do certain things.

But I find this hard to explain.

Even though I am less paranoid than some of my sane friends about privacy and similar issues in this digital age, I reached a point where I had to nod and agree that lines are being crossed.

It's interesting to consider the kinds of things that are possible now at a computer network can recognize faces and generate its own media. I will allow you to consider these things yourself.

I am tired now— maybe it's too much for a paranoid schizophrenic to take in.

Human Nature And Dignity

Having schizophrenia is, I admit, a disadvantage. It can present a challenge, or series of them. Part of the problem is that I actually may not be as able in certain situations as others. Another part is the stigma that is attached to the illness.

Disability is actually a very common condition in our modern world. There are many types of disabilities— some mental, some physical. All present difficulties to those who suffer. I am sure that most disabled people would like to transcend their condition(s), and to be regarded as valued people.

To be clear, in recent times, most of the people in my immediate circle of family, friends and coworkers have been very supportive of my condition. They have been more accepting and encouraging than I would have expected.

I am happy about this, and I do indeed hope that other disabled people get treated with respect and decency.

All people, after all, deserve dignity. For they are born, indeed they suffer, and indeed they die. No one escapes this fate. The insane suffer and die alongside the sane. I make a plea then that this be remembered, and that we treat one another well, regardless of other factors.

Fears

As a schizophrenic living alone on various forms of government assistance, you might think I had little to worry about. The checks came in every month, and everything was taken care of.

However, there were very real concerns.

One involved government shutdown. Whenever the Feds would start talking about the debt ceiling, and the government would shut down, there were suggestions that Social Security checks would not go out. And when that monthly check is basically all you get (and you are living month to month), that creates a real issue.

A second big fear was of assessments. Every few years, Social Security would request that the awards recipient undergo a new series of considerations, to ascertain whether or not they could continue receiving SSDI money. In other words, were they “sick enough” or “the right kind of sick” to get the monthly checks.

I would count the months until these assessments, worrying that I would be found to be too healthy to get help, and wondering if I was able, that being the case, to return to work.

Now that I am employed and earn my own income, I am much more confident about the money I receive. I am no longer at the financial edge, looking into oblivion. I even have a modest savings.

It is a great relief.